



CITY OF APPLETON

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 1, 2025
To: Chairperson Hartzheim; Members of the HR/IT Committee; Appleton Common Council Members
From: Human Resources Director, Jay Ratchman
Subject: Mental Health Resources and Support for City of Appleton Employees

This memo is in response to a recent Alderperson inquiry regarding how we support and enhance the mental health of our employees.

The City of Appleton remains committed to the mental and emotional wellbeing of our employees. We recognize that mental health can permeate every facet of an employee's life. As an employer, by addressing and supporting mental health in the workplace, we strive to reduce health care costs, enhance job performance and satisfaction, and help employees enjoy a better quality of life both inside and outside of work, which will hopefully result in greater job satisfaction and retention with the City.

National data on mental health reveals that:

- One in five US adults suffer from one or more mental illnesses (23.1% of adults or 59.3 million people).
- 31% of adults experience an anxiety disorder at some time in their lives.
- Depression is estimated to cause 200 million lost workdays each year at a cost to employers of \$17 to \$44 billion.

Source: National Institute of Mental Health

Based on this information and a review of our annual Employee Assistance Program data and medical insurance aggregate data, the HealthSmart Team (our internal health and wellness team) chose to focus on mental health as one of top issues to address in 2025, along with movement and nutrition. This continues a long-term effort from our HealthSmart Team and overall organization to make mental health a priority. To help keep our employees healthy, we have implemented a variety of ongoing programs for our employees which address mental health in their personal and professional lives, including:

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP): we currently offer ComPsych to all of our employees (including alderpersons and seasonal staff) and family members living in their household. The confidential service is provided 24-7, 365 days/year and is available for in-person, virtual, and telephonic counselling visits at no cost to the employee. It also

provides a variety of online resources (e.g., legal assistance, financial counselling) to address a variety of stressors that impact employee mental wellbeing. In 2024, almost a third of our employees (27%) reached out to ComPsych for counselling assistance. The top identified issues were Stress, Anxiety, and Relationships.

- Profession-Specific Employee Resources: due to the nature of their positions, we offer mental health services specific to Police and Fire, including emergency one-on-one counselling and trauma care.
- Medical Insurance: employees and their families have direct access to mental health professionals and resources (without a referral). Employees can reach these resources in person or via Telehealth to make it as convenient as possible.
- Employee Training: supervisors and employees receive ongoing training on mental health. This year's Supervisor Training included a presentation by Kyle Gulya from Von Briesen & Roper Law Firm on ways our leaders can ensure employees are receiving the time and resources they need to support their own mental health and the wellbeing of their loved ones. Employees also receive ongoing training on our EAP program during New Employee Orientation, New Supervisor Orientation, and annual General Employee and Supervisor Training. In addition, we promote our EAP through informational posters, periodic awareness campaigns, and contact cards in all City break rooms and restrooms for employees to learn more about the resources available to them.

In addition to these resources, we also proactively seek input from our employees to learn how we can best support them both personally and professionally throughout their employee life cycle with us. We engage employees and ask for their insights during Onboarding surveys, Employee Engagement Conversations, Individual and Group Stay Interviews, Exit Interviews, and more. Because of the feedback collected through these efforts, we have implemented programs such as:

- Flexible Work Options to promote better work-life balance;
- Dress for Your Day to allow more flexibility in work attire; and
- Greater Uniform Options to allow for more comfortable clothing for field staff (e.g., reflective t-shirts versus uncomfortable uniforms).

Specifically during 2025, to further support our employees' mental wellbeing, our HealthSmart Team has offered/will offer the following:

- EAP Awareness Training for our Appleton Public Library Staff (presented 4/18);
- EAP Awareness Campaigns to increase knowledge of ComPsych resources;
- Caregiver Seminar for employees who are in the 'sandwich' generation and caring for parents and children/others;
- World Mental Health Day (October 10) mindfulness program;
- Mental Health Journals to promote healthy ways to process and alleviate stress;

- Dealing with Holiday Challenges stress management technique program;
- Quarterly Bucket Lists/Challenges to promote getting outside to enjoy family-oriented activities; and
- Ongoing MotionConnected exercise challenges to help promote physical activity to reduce the effects of stress on their lives.

Other ways we provide support to help employees combat mental stress include:

- Financial Wellness programs and education to help staff save for a successful future and lessen financial stress;
- On-site Trauma Resources to support employees when a major event occurs in the workplace (e.g. on-site counsellors after a serious employee event/injury);
- One-on-one Job Coaching to assist employees who are struggling on the job due to stress to get them on the right track for success in their position; and
- Health Coaching and Assessments through our Connecting Care Clinic to promote healthy habits.

As evidenced above, we consider our employees' mental health as one of our top priorities and we will continue to support our employees as they deal with life's challenges. If you would like more details on any of the programs mentioned above or have suggestions on how we can better assist our employees in the future, please let us know.